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Serving two masters

IT IS EASY to say, as many have said, that whether a journalist wishes to be recruited for CIA work should be left up to the individual journalist. But what of the millions who rely upon the journalist to be independent, untouched by even "good" influences?

For that matter, what of the journalist's employer? Shouldn't he have a voice in the decision? More is involved here than an individual's right to use his free time as he sees fit. In most known cases, the CIA has engaged the services of foreign correspondents sent abroad at their employers' expense. This puts the matter in a different light.

Aside from the employer's right to resist paying the travel expenses of CIA agents, there is the matter of the objectivity the employer has a right to expect from writers sent abroad. Will the CIA point of view creep into commentary written by CIA writer-spies?

Very probably, we would say. Moreover, there is the more frightening possibility that commentary would be tailored to accommodate CIA programs. Human nature, we suspect, would make it impossible for a spy to ignore opportunities thus opened to him.

Stansfield Turner, the CIA director, implies that the news-gathering community is unpatriotic when it opposes efforts to merge the function of spy with the function of news reporting. He is surprised by the hostility of editors, publishers, and writers' organizations.

This is the shortsighted view of a man who obviously does not perceive that informing America of what is happening in the world — without the hand of government, without even the appearance of conflict, is itself a patriotic function deserving of special mention in the Constitution. It is a patriotic job the press cannot do if its writers are spies.